

Part II: Y-Town, Pavlik, & A New Beginning

Youngstown in Perspective

“According to a local newspaper, Youngstown, Ohio has scored a number of firsts:

‘...the first strike by nurses in the country, and the first strike by teachers; the first school system in the nation to close due to a lack of money; during the 1950s, number one in gangland car bombings; and today, first in the number of unsolved gangland murders; and the largest plant closing in the nation’s history...’”

----Excerpted from Staughton’s Lynd’s 1982 book, *The Fight Against Shutdowns*

“With Generation Y, we are the first generation that doesn’t remember the days of the steel mills. We are simply inheriting a situation, or approaching the city, from the viewpoint that we have never known how things used to be, and what had happened. With the young people that are here, they’re here by choice. They’re not here because they have to be here any longer. We’ve either obtained our education locally in the state, to get on board, or left the city to get our education, and came back.

This phenomenon, this ground swell that is happening, has multiple story lines. It probably started with the City of Youngstown’s ‘2010 Plan’, which most people might not be completely aware of, or fully comprehend, but they generally understand what it symbolizes. It’s a plan for the future. Something conceived by the people itself, from the town halls over a three-year period.

Then, you have Mayor Williams, who is the first elected African-American, Independent, youngest mayor in the city’s history. We had been so far behind the curve in so many ways, but with these new initiatives and changes, we just seem to be coming out of nowhere. You know how Youngstown is. It was written off as dead, and then suddenly, it’s like a fist has come up through the ground. It was such a jolt ahead of the curve in land use planning, community planning, and the change in politics. It’s almost as if we can use a boxing analogy and use Rocky IV as an example. The Russian is pounding the crap out of Rocky, and suddenly out of nowhere, Rocky lands that right, and cuts the Russian. It’s like the Russian is now cut, and there’s an opportunity.

-----Phil Kidd, founder of www.defendyoungstown.com, in an answer to my question about the past, present, and future of Youngstown during our interview on February 4, 2008.

Kelly Pavlik, as we all know, is viewed in the popular media as the quintessential working man’s symbol of Youngstown, Ohio. Youngstown, long deemed a victim of deindustrialization and outsourcing, and has been written off more times than bad debt, and has been relegated to the scrap heap of America, both literally and figuratively, for a long time.

Nonetheless, the past and future of Youngstown, as I will demonstrate, is infinitely more multi-faceted than the popular media purports. In kind, Kelly Pavlik is a much more complex symbol for the sport of boxing, and Youngstown, as well. The new generations, both X & Y, play a huge role in this regard.

To stereotype Youngstown as a typical American Rust Belt town is a big mistake. Rather, Youngstown is unquestionably the most unique city in the Rust Belt. Youngstown has one of the deepest and most compelling histories of any city I've ever come across.

To understand the essence of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, you have to go back to the 1830s. Sherry Linkon and John Russo's 2002 book, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, explains the regional mentality of the area extremely well. It's a history of tough, stubborn, independent-minded people, who were always willing to fight to the end against the odds for what they thought was right, regardless of the actual outcome.

"Almost from the beginning, labor disputes involved battles not just between workers and owners but also among workers over the issue of who 'owned' the work. Local historian Howard Aley traces organized labor in the Mahoning Valley back to the 1830s and records the first meeting of the Mechanics of Youngstown in 1843. The first strikes hit in 1865, and again in 1869, when fifteen hundred coal miners were off the job for four months. Despite losses during these initial strikes, the miners struck again in 1873. This series of strikes represented an important first wave of labor-management conflict, a class-based division that remains significant in Youngstown today."

The immigrants who worked the coal mines in the mid-1800s originated from Wales, Ireland, and Germany. The genesis of the steel industry began not long thereafter, and accelerated rapidly up to the early part of the beginning of the 20th century.

Youngstown's process of converting into a full-blown industrial economy was fast and furious. From 1890 to 1920, the population of Youngstown grew from slightly more than 33,000 people to over 130,000 people.

In the decade from 1910 and 1920, Youngstown became the largest producing steel city in America behind Andrew Carnegie's monolithic line of mills in Pittsburgh's Monongahela Valley. The new wave of immigration into Youngstown was predominately from Eastern Europe, mostly Italians, Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Greeks.

At the same time, Youngstown's historical penchant for labor strife and violence was manifested during its rapid growth spurt. In 1916, steelworkers in East Youngstown engaged in a strike over inhumane working and living conditions. By the time the strike ended, several blocks of East Youngstown had burned to the ground, nearly 10 people were killed, and well over 100 people were injured.

In 1937, when Youngstown's population was roughly 170,000, the infamous "Little Steel Strike" occurred. Steelworkers, primarily from Republic Steel Company and The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, went on strike due to poor working conditions and low wages.

Author Robert Bruno's acclaimed 1999 book, *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown*, explained both the extreme division between management and labor, and the level of violence of the 1937 strike, extraordinarily well. Bruno gives an account of the strike from an ex-steelworker at the time, George Papalko.

"Gus Hall and guys like us would break into the scab houses and wreck them, just tear them up. We'd look for the company stooges. During the 1937 strike the company had gunmen in the 'number 1' crane in the shipping department. They killed one guy there. Shot him dead."

The 1937 strike resulted in two deaths, and dozens of injuries. Youtube.com has a nice overview of the history and significance of the strike.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WV2q0k-uxU>

The 1937 strike was not initially completely successful, but it did have a long-term impact. In 1941, After decades of struggle, the strikes ultimately led to better working conditions and better pay in the form of the CIO. The CIO was the main catalyst in unionization in that year.

As a result, Youngstown's highly paid unionized workforce created a big middle class characterized by high levels of home ownership. Second and third shift work was commonplace in various industries connected to the steel economy for several decades.

It was blue-collar prosperity at its best.

Youngstown also became one of the most ethnic cities in America with the assimilation of immigrants into Youngstown culture since the turn of the century. Deep, old, traditional customs were manifested in the form of balkanized, Irish, German, Italian, and Slovakian neighborhoods.

Despite all of the positive things that happened in Youngstown, other factors were subtly sabotaging the city beneath the surface. For instance, race was, and is, a significant issue in Youngstown. African-Americans, who came to Youngstown in streams since the early part of the 20th century, lived in the poorer sections of the city, and held lower level jobs in the mills. In kind, the Ku Klux Klan became evident in Youngstown as far back as the early part of the 20th century, and maintained a visible presence for a long time.

As time passed, "white flight" eventually developed. Starting in the late 1950s and 1960s, Eddie DeBartolo's famous malls, with headquarters 10 miles south of Youngstown in Boardman, began to pop up all over the fast growing suburbs. Slowly, a line started to be drawn between the city and the outlying areas.

As the suburbs began to grow, Youngstown also began to stagnate to a certain extent. It was as though a false sense of prosperity had developed. Steel mill employment created college education funds for children. Additionally, if a child didn't attend college, long-term, high paying industrial work with excellent fringe benefits was available in the mills, sometimes for life. Many steelworkers worked in the mills for 40 years or more.

The table below shows the slowing of population growth in Youngstown from 1930 until 1960.

Years	Population
1930	170,002
1940	167,720
1950	168,330
1960	166,688

*Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

Another major, negative undercurrent affecting Youngstown was the presence of organized crime in the city during the entire 20th century.

The "Midwest Mafia" became a popular Youngstown moniker. It started small, grew, and festered in proportion to the city's increased complacency, and was exacerbated by the fact that during the 1950s and 1960s, the Youngstown mob became powerfully linked with other mob networks across the country.

Eventually, the mob had a huge impact on how Youngstown functioned as a city. Linkon and Russo describe the widespread violence, culture, and structure of the mob in Youngstown during the 1960s.

“In 1963, a *Saturday Evening Post* cover story dubbed Youngstown ‘Crime Town USA,’ describing seventy-five car bombings, known locally as ‘Youngstown tune-ups,’ and eleven killings. Youngstown became a mob battlefield largely because of its location midway between New York City and Chicago. The rackets in Youngstown were very profitable.”

Linkon and Russo continue.

“So embedded was organized crime that the *Saturday Evening Post* argued that ‘the Youngstown area exemplifies the truism that rackets cannot survive without two basic conditions---the sanction of police and politicians and an apathetic public. Here those conditions have combined to produce a breakdown in the democratic process.’”

Youngstown essentially became an inherently corrupt city with an economic dependence on organized crime. To put it another way, organized crime was an accepted element of the big picture of the Mahoning Valley.

Linkon, Russo, as well as other Youngstown historians, have also shown that this culture filtered into the legitimate business sector. Several industries in Youngstown became monopolistic, fixed markets, and ultimately set up the demise of the city.

Youngstown had become inert and inflexible, and left them completely unprepared for an upheaval nobody expected.

Black Monday & Beyond

On Monday, September 19, 1977, almost exactly 30 years prior to Pavlik’s upset victory over Jermain Taylor, the basic foundation of Youngstown changed forever. “Black Monday”, as it later became known, was the start of no less than widespread economic genocide in the Youngstown metropolitan area.

On that day, Youngstown Sheet & Tube announced the closing of its Campbell Works, a draconian move resulting in the loss of 5,000 jobs for that plant alone.

Over the next two years, steel plants owned by Youngstown Sheet & Tube, U.S. Steel, and Republic Steel, all symbols of Youngstown’s history of industrial power, would permanently close plants in the area.

Linkon & Russo describe the calamitous fallout.

“The Ohio Bureau of Employment Services estimated that fifty thousand jobs were lost in basic steel and related industries. Estimates suggest that the working class of Youngstown lost \$1.3 billion in manufacturing wages annually, unemployment reached 24.9% in 1983, and the community saw an unprecedented number of personal bankruptcies and foreclosures.”

It’s been a manifold spiral of decline ever since, and the uphill struggle continues.

Why all of the steel companies exited Youngstown is the subject of great debate. However, one factor in the closing of the Youngstown plants can’t be disputed: The plants were old and antiquated, and would require enormous capital to upgrade at a time when the steel industry was in steep decline.

Most importantly, as labor attorney, activist, and historian Staughton Lynd astutely noted in his 1982 book about the mill shutdowns, all of the plants that were closed in Youngstown used open hearth furnaces. Open hearth technology had become obsolete by that time as more efficient basic oxygen furnaces and electric arc furnaces used in other parts of the country took over the industry.

On one side of the coin, from a labor versus management perspective, the steel companies, many of which became large conglomerates with corporate headquarters outside of the Mahoning Valley, can be viewed as distant, callous, profiteers with allegiance to only themselves and shareholders. In this sense, the stakeholders--the families of mill workers and the long line of businesses dependent on the Youngstown mills---were simply abandoned by steel company executives.

On the other side of the coin, Youngstown's history of militant labor relations is felt by many to be an integral part of the collapse. To clarify, the area's mill workers were always known as being among of the absolute best in the world, but the history of strikes and chronic, negative labor relations reduced the likelihood of updating and modernizing the mills when America's industrial decline started in the mid-to-late 1970s.

Indeed, according to Lynd, U.S. Steel was actually quite wealthy during the time of the shutdowns.

To further illustrate, U.S. Steel made the choice to allocate \$6.2 billion to purchase Marathon Oil in 1982 instead of reinvesting in Youngstown. Moreover, the company was also looking for new land in rural Conneaut, Ohio to start a mill from scratch with new technology. Conneaut is just one hour north from Youngstown on the Lake Erie shore. The proposed new mill was never built, but U.S. Steel continued on in the steel business outside of Youngstown, and remains the largest steel company in America, with revenues close to \$17 billion.

Staughton Lynd is a controversial figure in Youngstown, and in American history. Born in 1929, Lynd's parents, the famous sociologists, Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Lynd, authored one of the most important sociological treatises on middle American life, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, during the Depression.

Lynd earned his Ph.D. in history from Columbia University in 1960, and after years of activism in the South, became a professor at Yale University.

Lynd, a pacifist Quaker, became one of the key figures in the early stages of the Vietnam War protests. Lynd was actually the first to lead a march on Washington in protest of the war.

While still at Yale, he traveled with Tom Hayden on a mission to Hanoi, a move that enraged Washington so much that the State Department revoked his passport. Not long thereafter, despite being a respected academic, Lynd's tenure at Yale mysteriously disappeared.

Disenfranchised, Lynd moved to Chicago in the late 1960s, and struggled as a community organizer for several years. He applied to law school at the University of Chicago, and after facing protests by faculty members, was eventually accepted. Lynd earned his law degree in his mid-forties, and took a job with a Youngstown law firm shortly after graduation.

Lynd, a man of deep principle and unshakeable beliefs, had a tough time adapting to life in a conventional law firm. He chose to represent militant truckers, and eventually published a short, but famous 58-page book titled, *Labor Law for the Rank-And-Filer*, in 1978.

When Lynd presented the book, which emphasized self-help and education for workers instead of reflexive reliance on law firms, to his boss, he was fired almost immediately.

Lynd eventually landed a job with the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, and became deeply entrenched in the battle to keep the Youngstown mills open.

From the late 1970s until the early 1980s, Lynd filed a series of lawsuits against the steel companies. During that period, he clashed to a certain degree with a number of union officials who seemed to be more committed to themselves than their workers.

Lynd became a thorn in the side to both steel company executives and union officials alike, but was still revered by many in the community for his well-constructed, highly intelligent legal attacks on the steel companies.

At one point in the battle, in a gutsy and dramatic legal maneuver, Lynd subpoenaed the Chairman and CEO of U.S. Steel, David Roderick, and in front of hostile steelworkers in a Youngstown court, made Roderick explain why he chose to shut down the mills.

Nonetheless, as we know, despite strong community protest, the mills shut down, and Youngstown never really recovered.

Community pride was later manifested in the form of Youngstown boxing champions Ray Mancini, Harry Arroyo, Jeff Lampkin, and Greg Richardson during the 1980s and 1990s, and with Jim Tressel’s string of Division I-A national championships when he was head football coach at Youngstown State, but obviously, it wasn’t enough.

As for Staughton Lynd, now 78, he remains in the Youngstown area, and still represents the interests of the elderly and the rights of prison inmates. His most recent book, *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising*, published in 2004, documented the 1993 Lucasville, Ohio prison riot, the country’s most devastating prison riot since Attica.

To further illustrate the fallout of the Youngstown mill shutdowns, the table below shows the population decline in Youngstown from 1970 to 2006. As you can see, Youngstown, which is a much smaller, more isolated city compared to Detroit, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, took an enormous hit.

Years	Youngstown
1970	139,788
1980	115,427
1990	95,787
2000	82,206
2006	81,520
Net Loss	-58,268
% Loss	-42%

The hit was especially hard on Youngstown because approximately 45% - 50% of the city’s workforce was employed in heavy industry, many workers had long, traditional ties to the city, and new, viable industry never really replaced the steel jobs.

General Motors’ sprawling Lordstown plant, approximately ½ hour outside of Youngstown, absorbed some of the shock and still remains open to this day, but throughout the 1980s, unemployment levels in Youngstown were usually among the highest in the nation. Even the continued presence of two smaller steel mills, WCI in Warren, Ohio, and V & M Star in Youngstown, haven’t come close to reminding the area of the glory days of the past.

It simply didn't have a buffer---a diversified economy----to keep it on its feet.

Since the shutdowns, Youngstown has gone through many changes. Mirroring the trend of many cities during the 1980s, inner city crime increased along with the decline of the population base and the loss of skilled manufacturing jobs.

All the way up to this decade, Youngstown has maintained one of the highest murder rates by % of population in the United States. Furthermore, in line with the trend of increased national incarceration rates from the 1980s to present, prisons now dot the landscape all over the Youngstown area. This phenomenon has created a lot of jobs for the citizens of Youngstown, but is representative of the decline of the area, and America, as well.

In 1998, in a new low, due to continued entrenched mob influence in Youngstown, and national publicity related to the botched mob hit of a local prosecutor, John F. Kennedy Jr's magazine, *George*, named Youngstown as the most corrupt city in America.

Corruption continued to be symbolized in the city during the early part of this decade with the convictions of a lengthy list of city officials, and the indictment and imprisonment of long-time Youngstown congressman, James Traficant. Traficant, an eccentric populist, was convicted on charges of racketeering, filing false tax returns, and taking bribes in 2002. Traficant, who quixotically and comically announced another run for office while incarcerated a few years ago, is scheduled for release from prison in 2009.

Needless to say, Youngstown has experienced more than its share of severe problems, but with the old guard now fading from the Youngstown scene, and with population decline now appearing to have bottomed out, change is ripe on the horizon.

Pavlik: A Complicated Symbol of Hope

The rise of Kelly Pavlik has come at a unique time in Youngstown's history. As noted above, despite continued economic pressure and a negative national image, Youngstown has sort of bottomed out.

There seems to be no place to go but up.

As a result of the various changes Youngstown has experienced, Pavlik is actually a deeper and more meaningful figure to the city than the Youngstown boxing champions of the 1980s and 1990s. He is a link to both the past, and to the future.

From one perspective, Pavlik, the son of a former steelworker, represents the positive, solid, traditional blue-collar ethic of Youngstown industrial pride. He is a link to a proud generation, a generation who fought for dignity and respect, no matter what the cost.

It is part of a deep ethic woven into the fabric of Youngstown culture. An ethic exemplified by the intangibles of perseverance and fortitude, an ethic that always forges ahead in the face of sometimes seemingly impossible odds.

To take this further, when Kelly Pavlik survived Jermain Taylor's second round onslaught, rallied, and knocked Taylor out in the seventh round, it was representative of all that used to be right about Youngstown's past.

The ability of an underdog to endure and ultimately prevail.

To get a better perspective on the meaning of Pavlik's victory for this article, and what Pavlik symbolizes for the Youngstown area, I went straight to the best source I could find: Greg "Rusty" Rosenberger.

When people talk about Youngstown fighters, you rarely hear Rusty's name mentioned. Rusty, now 52, was born and raised in the Youngstown area, and currently resides outside of the city in the suburb of Niles.

After an extensive amateur career, Rusty signed with the Duvas and became the New Jersey State middleweight champion in 1979. Rusty retired from boxing in 1991 with a record of 20-6 (10 KOs). Rusty published his life story, *Unclaimed Destiny: The Heart of a Champion*, in 2003.

Here is a link to a review of the book:

<http://www.readerviews.com/ReviewRosenbergerUnclaimedDestiny.html>

By his own admission, Rusty was damaged by boxing. For many years, his speech has been slurred, but unlike many boxers damaged by the sport, he is actually a symbol of grit and hope. Once again, all that is right about Youngstown.

In 2005, I attended a banquet in Youngstown honoring several boxers from the area. Matthew Saad Muhammad and Jose Antonio Rivera were guest speakers.

Just before the start of the banquet, I was chatting with a group of people, and a powerfully built man with an extremely low % of body fat for a person of his age walked in.

Members of the group, who obviously surmised that this person was an older elite athlete, quickly asked me if I knew who the person was. I replied in the negative. At the time, I didn't know who Rusty was.

Later on during the banquet, Rusty made a passionate speech to the group of approximately fifty guests about his life and struggles, both during and after boxing. At the end of the speech, he received a rousing ovation.

Since that time, I've traded e-mails with Rusty every year, and ask for his opinions on a variety of topics.

Rusty has worked in the Youngstown correctional system for years, and was promoted to Sergeant and Correctional Counselor six years ago. Outside of his career in the field of corrections, Rusty is the owner and founder of <http://www.rustysbodyboxing.com/>, a great program in which he's operated in the Youngstown area for a long time.

Despite being damaged by boxing, through extreme discipline and hard work, Rusty is in better shape than most people who are half his age. With an amazing resting heart rate of 45-50 beats per minute, Rusty continues to cross train daily, and helps local fighters in the area as well.

For the purposes of this article, I asked him about Pavlik's victory, what Pavlik means to Youngstown, and about the rematch this weekend.

Always thoughtful and bluntly honest, here is what Rusty had to say.

"After pondering your question, considering Youngstown's erosion of jobs and opportunity, mainly due to the closing of many thriving steel mills, Pavlik is a sign of hope, and believing in yourself, no matter the expert's opinion, or the insurmountable odds against you may be.

The experts say Youngstown is no more, and will never be a prosperous city again. A prediction, or an opinion, similar to the first meeting between Taylor and Pavlik. The so called boxing experts said Taylor was such an accomplished fighter, better hand speed, better foot moment, technically more sound, having fought better quality opponents, all of which were true.

What the experts neglected to consider is the burning desire and sheer toughness of Kelly. True enough, Kelly is not as talented, but no one can ever deny the size of his heart, and the equally powerful big right hand he possesses.

The experts also didn't consider or remember an old boxing saying, " a puncher's chance," which Kelly had and will hope for and count on in the rematch, because in reality, that's the real chance he has to win the second go around. Land that atom bomb of a right hand, and finish the fight as soon as possible.

If Taylor maintains his wits and composure, he's capable of shredding Pavlik's face like a surgeon in the operating room. The fight could be over within 8 rounds, if Taylor utilizes his superior footwork.

What makes this fight so exciting will be Taylor's ability to stay away from Pavik's powerful right hand, and Taylor's ability to outmaneuver Pavlik, slipping that big right hand Pavlik is counting so much on.

"A puncher's chance" is what Kelly always has. The same kind of luck Youngstown needs to emerge from the deep depression they're in.

Is luck on Youngstown/Pavlik's side? Time will tell?"

From another perspective, Pavlik, a child of Generation Y with a graphics design diploma, is a departure from Youngstown's negative history, despite the fact that Generation Y is generally viewed in negative terms in contemporary American society. In proper context, this new generation in Youngstown is in a different spot than other members of the Generation Y demographic throughout the country.

As the founder and owner of www.defendyoungstown.com, Phil Kidd, told me last week, the new generation in "Y-Town" was too young to understand what was occurring during the steel mill shutdowns, wasn't exposed to the genesis of pernicious mob infiltration, and is starting fresh. It's almost akin to being part of a new group of refugees who are picking up the pieces of the past, changing the tone and mindset of a region, and restructuring the community for the next 100 years.

Phil Kidd, 28, was recently appointed as Youngstown's new Director of Events, Special Projects and Community Outreach for downtown Youngstown. Last week, I interviewed Mr. Kidd, and asked him about what Pavlik symbolizes for the area. Here is what he had to say.

"What Kelly symbolizes crosses over all things. It doesn't matter what was, or what is happening now. Whether it's politics or economic development or the churches, he is that one person in this community where everything stops, and everyone gets behind because he's a symbol of the city."

Mr. Kidd continued his thought process.

"Knowing Kelly as a person, as he's excelled to this level of celebrity and success, I think it's largely attributable to what Youngstown represents now during this transition phase. Youngstown is now starting to perceive itself differently, and is rejecting old labels. Kelly is loved here because he epitomizes the kind of person we want to portray to the world. Maybe if it was 10 years ago, when things were different, he might've left here and set up shop somewhere else. Now, it's different. He is a part of a new phase in Youngstown. He is a citizen of Youngstown, but he's more than that. He's THE citizen of Youngstown. That's the way he's

perceived. He is insulated from the outside world in a positive way. We're like his big nuclear, or even extended, family. We feel it, and he feels it. There's a ground swell of fight and hope here, and he symbolized that when he said in the HBO documentary that Youngstown keeps you hungry."

In essence, Pavlik is a composite sketch of the positive and pivotal attributes of Youngstown. Down-to-earth, humble, hard working, yet also part of a new generation seeking to break away from the past, and to forge a more positive future for the next generations to come.

The New Beginning

Youngstown and boxing have a lot in common. Once booming and a major part of the cultural mosaic of industrial America, both Youngstown and boxing fell on hard times due to mismanagement from the top, corruption, and complacency, and have been teetering on the edge of permanent disaster for a long time.

Regardless of the past, a new beginning may be on the horizon. Pavlik, a symbol of the new generation of Youngstown, is a positive, yet counterintuitive symbol for boxing as well.

In the contemporary malaise of boxing, it has become fashionable for fighters to sign big contracts, engage in ostentatious behavior, go through a series of trainers, leave their hometowns for the Sun Belt, allow sycophants to feed off of their earnings, and end up never meeting their initial expectations.

It is this attitude and behavior that exemplifies the worst of Generation X and Y.

Kelly Pavlik has succeeded in a much different way. It is almost the exact inverse from what we're accustomed to seeing.

After all, for starters, in theory Kelly Pavlik shouldn't even be a boxer. In accordance with the lineage of white ethnic fighters since the early 20th century, Pavlik should've been an example of assimilation. A person of the third or fourth generation of immigrants of Slovakian Youngstown, who went on to Youngstown State University, Kent State, or Ohio State, and now wear a suit and tie and carry a briefcase. From another angle, he could've gone into MMA, like so many others of his generation over the last several years.

Instead, he chose a sport he probably should've never attempted, was not a pampered prospect, and served an inordinately long apprenticeship under the same trainer he started with at the age of 9. By all accounts, he has not gone on wild spending sprees, and prefers to live and train in his hometown, a hometown that is considered a backwater not only in boxing, but in America as well.

If anything, Pavlik has exceeded the expectations of the boxing public since he turned pro almost 8 years ago. Although the promoter – fighter relationship is always difficult, he has maintained a cordial business relationship with Bob Arum since the beginning of his career, and along with his father, has remained loyal to his manager, Cameron Dunkin, who is widely regarded as one of the best in the business.

At a deeper level, in accordance with the positive attributes of the Generation Y demographic, Pavlik possesses a fresh individualistic streak I hope to see more of from fighters in the future. When asked to attend an out of town function by his promoter, Bob Arum, after defeating Taylor last September, Pavlik politely declined, and chose to stay in Youngstown and attend eastern Ohio functions instead.

In boxing, it is wise, under many circumstances, to know when to say no. Pavlik has done an excellent job in that regard thus far, and this new generation of fighters can learn from that.

As Don King and the old guard promoters are about to set sail into the sunset, boxing will change. It's almost similar to the old, corrupt guard of Youngstown disappearing, and paving the way for a new generation to take over. As with anything, tough choices will be made by the new generation of promoters in boxing, just as tough choices will be made by the new generation of leaders in Youngstown. Those choices will pave the way towards a positive or negative future.

As I've demonstrated in this article, the weight of the structural shift in America, in Youngstown, and in the sport of boxing, are immense. The ability to move forward seamlessly is virtually impossible. It will take a lot of hard work. There is simply too much baggage to overcome the past in short order. In a quick fix world, fixing boxing, Youngstown, and America is a difficult task which may take a generation or two.

Regardless of statistics and trends, as noted, hope does exist, and there are always exceptions to the rule, especially in a new post-industrial landscape characterized by rapid change and unpredictability.

In sum, the odds are both against boxing, and Youngstown. Pavlik, as Rusty Rosenberger aptly stated, will likely face a tougher task this Saturday night than the experts expect, but Pavlik always has that puncher's chance, as does the sport of boxing, Youngstown, and America.

Greg Smith was born and raised in Los Angeles. He married his wife, Joan, an Ohio native and Ohio State Buckeye alum, in 1989. They reside 10 miles away from a steel mill town in southwestern Ohio with their two children.

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